

Psychological Pre-employment Evaluations  
for Safety Sensitive Positions

Kiri A. Faul, Ph.D., LP  
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Gary L. Fischler & Associates, PA  
CONSULTING & FORENSIC PSYCHOLOGISTS  
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Learning Objectives

- Describe the core domains of police and public safety psychology, and their application in general-to-safety sensitive agencies
- Describe why PEPEs are critical in hiring, especially in safety sensitive positions
- Identify ways to make a PEPE most effective
- Show the ability to help employers make the best decisions when requesting PEPEs
- Identify agency benefits and importance regarding a successful screening process
- Describe the difference between a pre-employment psychological evaluation and a fitness-for-duty evaluation

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Core Domains of Police and Public Safety Psychology

- Assessment
- Intervention
- Operational Support
- Consultation

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**Prevalence of PEPs:**

- 38 states have statutory and/or regulatory requirements for PEPs for law enforcement
- 100,000 evaluations performed every year by as many as 4,000 psychologists (Corey & Borum, 2013)
- U.S. DOJ study: approximately 98% of U.S. law enforcement agencies serving communities of 25,000 or more residents used psychological screening in selecting applicants (Reaves, 2010)
- Vast majority of agencies use PEPs whether or not they are legally required
- Also required by US DOE for access to nuclear power plants
- Often required in other safety-sensitive positions (e.g., firefighters, paramedics, airline pilots, air traffic controllers, etc.)

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**The Purpose of PEPs**

**Threefold:**

- To determine whether an applicant meets the minimum requirements for psychological suitability mandated by jurisdictional statutes and regulations;
- Is free from any emotional or mental conditions that might adversely affect the performance of safety-based duties and responsibilities, and
- Is capable of withstanding the psychological demands inherent in the position.

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**The Need: Want vs. Suitability**

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Federal Employment Foundation Laws

- Essential
  - ADA Title I & ADA
  - GINA Title II
  - HIPAA
  - FMLA
  - CRA (Title VII & 1991)
  - Rehab Act of 1973
  - USERRA
  - UGESP (1978)
- Important
  - Section 1983
  - 5 CFR §339

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Foundational Cases

- Essential:
  - Garrity v. New Jersey (1967)
  - Schloendorff v. Society of NY Hospital (1914)
  - Brady v. Maryland (1963)
- Important:
  - Barnett v. U.S. Air (2000)
  - Siefken v. Village of Arlington Heights (1996)
  - Palmer v. Cir. Ct. of Cook County (1997)

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Effective PEPs



When Hiring the Right Person is Critical

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### The PEPE Interview: You Passed – You Failed



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### Examiner Qualifications

Who Conducts PEPEs?

Competency

Culturally Competent

Knowledge Base – Scientific, Professional and Legal

Ethical Standards

Conflict of Interest

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### Pre-employment Psychological Evaluations

Professional Practice Guidelines for Occupationally Mandated Psychological Evaluations (APA, 2017)  
<https://www.apa.org/practice/guidelines/psychological-evaluations>

Peace Officer Psychological Screening Manual (California POST, 2019)  
<https://post.ca.gov/peace-officer-psychological-screening-manual>

International Association of Chiefs of Police, Police Psychological Services Section (IACP-PPSS) Preemployment Psychological Screening Guidelines (2014)  
<https://www.theiacp.org/sites/default/files/all/p-1/Psych-PreemploymentPsychEval.pdf>

Guidelines

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**Professional Guidelines and Standards:**

- At least two personality tests for abnormal (psychopathology) and normal (suitability) assessment
- Full review of background investigation and test results prior to interview
- Personal interview covering biographical history, mental health, substance use, employment, legal issues, etc.
- Written report with recommendation for applicant suitability

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**Psychological Dimensions in PEPEs**

- Interpersonal Behavior
  - 1) Social Competence
  - 2) Teamwork
  - 3) Assertiveness – Persuasiveness
- Judgment and Adaptability
  - 4) Decision-Making
  - 5) Adaptability/Flexibility
- Emotional Control
  - 6) Emotional Regulation – Stress Tolerance
  - 7) Avoiding Substance Abuse
  - 8) Impulse Control – Attention to Safety
- Work Attitudes
  - 9) Conscientiousness/Dependability
  - 10) Integrity/Ethics
- Communication/Learning Skills
  - 11) Vocabulary Skills
  - 12) Problem Solving - Learning

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**Evaluation Process:**

- Evidence-based derived from relevant empirical research, including job analyses, predictive validity studies
- Consistent with administrative and case law including ADA, GINA, and EEOC, HIPAA, etc.
- Consistent with authoritative sources, including International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) - Police Psychological Services Section (PPSS) *Pre-Employment Psychological Evaluation Guidelines*, and CA POST, *Peace Officer Psychological Screening Manual* (Spilberg & Corey, 2014, 2018)
- Fully transparent
- Highly defensible
- No adverse impact

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### Abnormal Personality and Psychopathology:

• **MMPI-2-RF Police Candidate Interpretive Report (Corey & Ben-Porath, 2014, 2018)**

The PCIR is a state-of-the-art interpretive report that provides empirically valid, research-based interpretations and predictions with regard to possible psychological problems and law enforcement officer job-related problems in the domains that are critical to essential job functions.

- Norms are also available for other safety sensitive positions
- Part of the PEPE process at the post-conditional offer stage

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### Normal Personality – Job Suitability:

- **California Psychological Inventory (CPI) - Police and Public Safety Selection Report (PPSSR)** uses norms developed specifically from law-enforcement, and other safety sensitive samples and uses research data to predict the probability of different types of problems arising at work. Our 2004 research indicates that many of the CPI scales predict a number of relevant work-related problems for police officers. Recent reanalysis (Roberts, 2014) affirms and expands on these findings using risk ratios.

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### Biographical Questionnaire and Structured Interview:

- **THE PERSONAL EXPERIENCES INVENTORY (PEI):** Questionnaire asks candidates to provide a detailed and comprehensive (21-page) background history, related to:

- Education
- Employment
- Military service
- Family and social history
- Physical health
- Mental health (including responses to critical incidents)
- Alcohol and drug use
- Legal issues
- Problematic sexual behaviors
- Financial/credit issues

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**FINAL  
WRITTEN  
REPORT:**

- Integrates **personal history** derived from PEI, interview, and background investigation information
- Interpretation of **test results**
- Risk ratings on **10 dimensions** of psychological functioning, validated by research, that are essential for work as a safety sensitive employee
- Final risk rating

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**FINAL  
WRITTEN  
REPORT: RISK  
RATINGS**

**Table 1. Screening domains representing psychologically essential psychological characteristics.**

Low Risk	Med Risk	High Risk	
			<b>Cluster 1: Interpersonal Behavior</b>
			1. <b>1. SOCIAL COMPETENCE:</b> Involves communicating with others in a tactful and respectful manner, and showing sensitivity and concern in one's daily interactions. Can interact and deal effectively with people from varying social and cultural backgrounds. Attempts to resolve conflicts through persuasion rather than force.
			2. <b>2. TEAMWORK:</b> Involves working effectively with others to accomplish goals, as well as subordinating personal interests for the good of the working group and agency. It involves establishing and maintaining effective, cooperative working relationships with colleagues, supervisors, community partners, representatives of other agencies, and others tasked with serving and protecting the community.
			3. <b>3. ASSERTIVENESS/PERSUASIVENESS:</b> Involves unhesitatingly taking control of situations in a calm and appropriately assertive manner, even under dangerous or adverse conditions.
			<b>Cluster 2: Judgment and Adaptability</b>
			4. <b>4. DECISION MAKING AND JUDGMENT:</b> Involves common sense, "street smarts," and the ability to make sound decisions, demonstrated by the ability to size up situations quickly and take the appropriate action. It also involves the ability to sift through information to glean that which is important, and, once identified, to use that information effectively.
			5. <b>5. ADAPTABILITY/FLEXIBILITY:</b> Involves the ability to change gears and easily adjust to the many different, subtle, and sometimes competing demands inherent in public safety work. Can apply knowledge and reasoning to make prompt and effective decisions quickly in both routine and non-routine situations; can make sound decisions in a timely manner; can size up a situation quickly and take appropriate actions.

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**FINAL  
WRITTEN  
REPORT: RISK  
RATINGS**

Low Risk	Med Risk	High Risk	
			<b>Cluster 3: Emotional Control</b>
			6. <b>6. EMOTIONAL REGULATION AND STRESS TOLERANCE:</b> Involves the ability to maintain composure and stay in control, particularly during life-threatening, time-critical events and other stressful situations. It includes taking the negative aspects of the job in stride and maintaining an even temperament, as well as accepting criticism rather than becoming overly defensive or allowing it to hamper job performance. Refrains from overreacting when subjected to physical or verbal abuse; exercises restraint and uses the minimum amount of force necessary to handle a given situation.
			7. <b>7. AVOIDING SUBSTANCE ABUSE AND OTHER RISK-TAKING BEHAVIOR:</b> Involves avoiding participation in behavior that is inappropriate, self-damaging, and can adversely impact organizational functioning, such as alcohol and drug abuse, domestic violence, sale of drugs and gambling.
			8. <b>8. IMPULSE CONTROL/ATTENTION TO SAFETY:</b> Involves taking proper precautions and avoiding impulsive and/or unnecessarily risky behavior to ensure both public and personal safety. Refrains from overreacting when subjected to physical or verbal abuse. Can maintain composure and perform effectively in stressful situations.

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## FINAL WRITTEN REPORT: RISK RATINGS

Low Risk	Med Risk	High Risk	Cluster 4 Work Attitudes
			<b>9. CONSCIENTIOUSNESS/DEPENDABILITY:</b> Involves diligent, reliable, conscientious work patterns, performing in a timely, logical manner in accordance with rules and regulations and agency policies. Follows orders, is reliable, thorough, punctual, accurate, can assume responsibility for share of the workload, works with minimal supervision. Can proceed on assignments without waiting to be told what to do, is consistently productive.
			<b>10. INTEGRITY/ETHICS:</b> Involves maintaining high standards of personal conduct. It consists of attributes such as honesty, impartiality, trustworthiness, and abiding laws, regulations and procedures.

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## FINAL WRITTEN REPORT: OVERALL RISK RATING

- Provides bottom-line recommendation for hiring
- Provides training and supervisory needs

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## The Importance of a Proper PEPE

- Case Example
  - Mohamed Noor
- What the PEPE results indicated

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## Benefits to the Hiring Agency

- Make more informed hiring decisions
- Ensure that potential employees are suitable before hiring them
- Assess the potential of a prospective employee to handle the job effectively under adverse conditions
- Reduce the number of problem employees
- Lower the risk of lawsuits
- Save on the cost of high employee turnover



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## PEPE VS. FFDE

### PEPE

#### Definition:

A preemployment psychological evaluation is a specialized examination to determine whether an applicant (typically public safety) meets the minimum requirements for psychological suitability mandated by jurisdictional statutes and regulations, as well as any other criteria established by the hiring agency.

In most jurisdictions, the minimum requirements for psychological suitability are that the applicant be free from any emotional or mental condition that might adversely affect the performance of safety-based duties and responsibilities and be capable of withstanding the psychological demands inherent in the prospective position.

(IACP-PPSS Guideline 3.1 & 3.2)

### FFDE

#### Definition:

A psychological FFDE is a formal, specialized examination of an incumbent employee that results from:

- (1) objective evidence that the employee may be unable to safely or effectively perform a defined job, and
  - (2) a reasonable basis for believing that the cause may be attributable to a psychological condition or impairment.
- The central purpose of an FFDE is to determine whether the employee is able to safely and effectively perform his or her essential job functions. (IACP-PPSS Guideline 3.1)

\*\*What they both have in common: Violence Risk Assessment

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QUESTIONS?

Kiri A. Faul, Ph.D., LP  
 kfaul@psycheval.com

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